



January, 1991

NEWSLETTER OF THE LONDON CHAPTER,  
ONTARIO ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 2574, Station B, London, ON. N6A 4G9



91-1

**In Search Of:  
Iroquoian Semi-Subterranean Sweat Lodges**

Rob MacDonald

This month we provide a report from a long-standing Chapter regular. Rob MacDonald will provide us with a presentation on this rather unusual feature type, and review some of the interpretations that have been put forth regarding function and significance. Speaker Night in March will be on the 14th, starting at 8 P.M., and, as always, will be held at the Museum of Indian Archaeology.

1991 Membership Fees are due, please send them in A.S.A.P.

and, most importantly:



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## EXECUTIVE REPORT

As you have no doubt gathered by now, the Chapter is pleased to announce the publication of the long, long, long awaited prehistory of Southern Ontario volume, edited by Chris Ellis and Neal Ferris. While the release date for the volume is not until early March, London Chapter members can order copies now. That's not all, however. We are so flush with finally producing this volume, we've decided to celebrate by hosting a formal book launch. We hope to have many of the authors on hand for this launch, as well as some of the people who assisted us in producing the volume. Of course members are also invited, so come on out for some well-deserved fun!

\* \* \* \*

### Official London Chapter Book Launch of the Prehistory Volume

**When:** Saturday, March 2nd, from 5:00 to 10:00 P.M.

**Where:** Marienbad's Upstairs Reception Room, 122 Carling Street, in Downtown London

Come on out and have a few drinks with the people who brought this all together!!

\* \* \* \*

While we are on the topic, the revenues expected from this volume will certainly bolster the Chapter's coffers, so the Executive is starting to consider what to do with this money. While it will, in part, help produce future issues of our Publication Series, other ideas kicked about have included renting office space or setting up an endowment fund. Other ideas would also be welcome, so please pass them on to the Executive.

On other fronts,

**1991 CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE NOW DUE, SO COUGH UP!!!!**

Thanks

## SOCIAL REPORT

The Executive is already considering a couple of ideas for weekend field projects. Chapter members can participate in this summer, but we'd still like some more ideas. If you think you might have a project in mind that you'd like to offer to the Chapter, or one you'd like to see done, please contact an Executive member.

Also, don't forget, February brings with it the annual Heritage week celebration. Pat informs us that the Chapter will provide a display, films and artifact IDs at London's Central Public Library downtown on Saturday February 16th, from 1-4:30 PM, as part of our contribution to Heritage Week. Anyone who could help out manning the display or identifying artifacts should contact Pat.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

We start the 1991 year right with an article from Carl Murphy, one of KEWA's regular contributors. This month Carl provides us with a succinct summary of the work he has done on the Western Basin Sherman site. The discovery and definition of a winter house on this unique site type, which so closely conforms to historically recorded Algonquian winter houses, makes Sherman "...more significant a find than another Huron village...", in the opinion of more than one archaeologist (who shall remain anonymous)!



Carl Murphy

## Introduction

Early in the spring of 1987, Mr. Stan Wortner of Bothwell, Ontario, found prehistoric cultural material and plough-truncated features on a farm owned by Louis and David Sherman. Stan gathered a diagnostic artifact sample and forwarded the material to the London office of the Ministry of Culture and Communications. From the surface collection it was evident that the remains dated to the Springwells phase (ca. A.D. 1200-1400) of the Ontario Western Basin Tradition, and that the assemblage was the result of a limited occupation. Our interest in the site was immediate, because few single component Springwells sites had been excavated at that time, and the interior location led us to believe that this site might represent a different settlement pattern than that observed for lakeshore or riverside sites. Also, since the site had only been cleared of trees in 1985 and cultivated twice in 1986, Sherman presented an opportunity to explore a small interior site that had not been subjected to years of ploughing and wind erosion. However, the sand dune on which the site is located is the highest point of land in the immediate area and fully exposed to the prevailing winds, and thus we were also aware that the site would not remain intact for much longer. With these considerations in mind, and indications that subsurface features may still be intact, rescue excavation was undertaken by volunteers from the London Chapter of the Ontario Archaeological Society in April and early May of 1987.

The Sherman site (AdHl-16) is located just under two kilometers north of the Thames River and 300 meters east of a small creek, near Thamesville Ontario. This site is situated near the central area of the Bothwell Sand Plain, which is a broad zone of shallow, outwash deposited sand overlying the deep clay base of central Kent and Middlesex counties (Chapman and Putnam 1966: 238-240). This sand plain is characterized by extremes in drainage, with the lighter sandy knolls and dunes being excessively dry over much of the year, while at the base of the knolls and lower areas water lays above the clay base, creating year round swamp conditions. Until recently, a large tract of the sand plain frustrated attempts to drain it for cultivation, and the Sherman site is on the western edge of an area affectionately referred to as "Skunk's Misery", or simply the "Misery", by past and current inhabitants. Early pioneers saw little value in hundreds of hectares of black ash swamp and blow sand knolls, but the biomass of this environment is exceptionally diverse, supporting a rich northern Carolinian plant community and large numbers of deer, smaller mammals and apparently lots of skunk.

## Settlement Patterns

After only a single season of cultivation and wind erosion, small clusters of cultural material, fired soil and charcoal were exposed on the western edge of the small knoll, and during the initial assessment it was quite apparent that wind deflation was disturbing the site on a daily basis. Excavations began by establishing a grid and sceeening topsoil through quarter-inch mesh over the immediate area of the main artifact concentration, and in the vicinity of an isolated, truncated pit southeast of the main concentration (Figure 1). Due to my eagerness to expose settlement pattern, a controlled surface collection was not undertaken. As it turned out this was unfortunate, since a C.S.P. could have aided other researchers in identifying and assessing similar artifact scatters elsewhere.



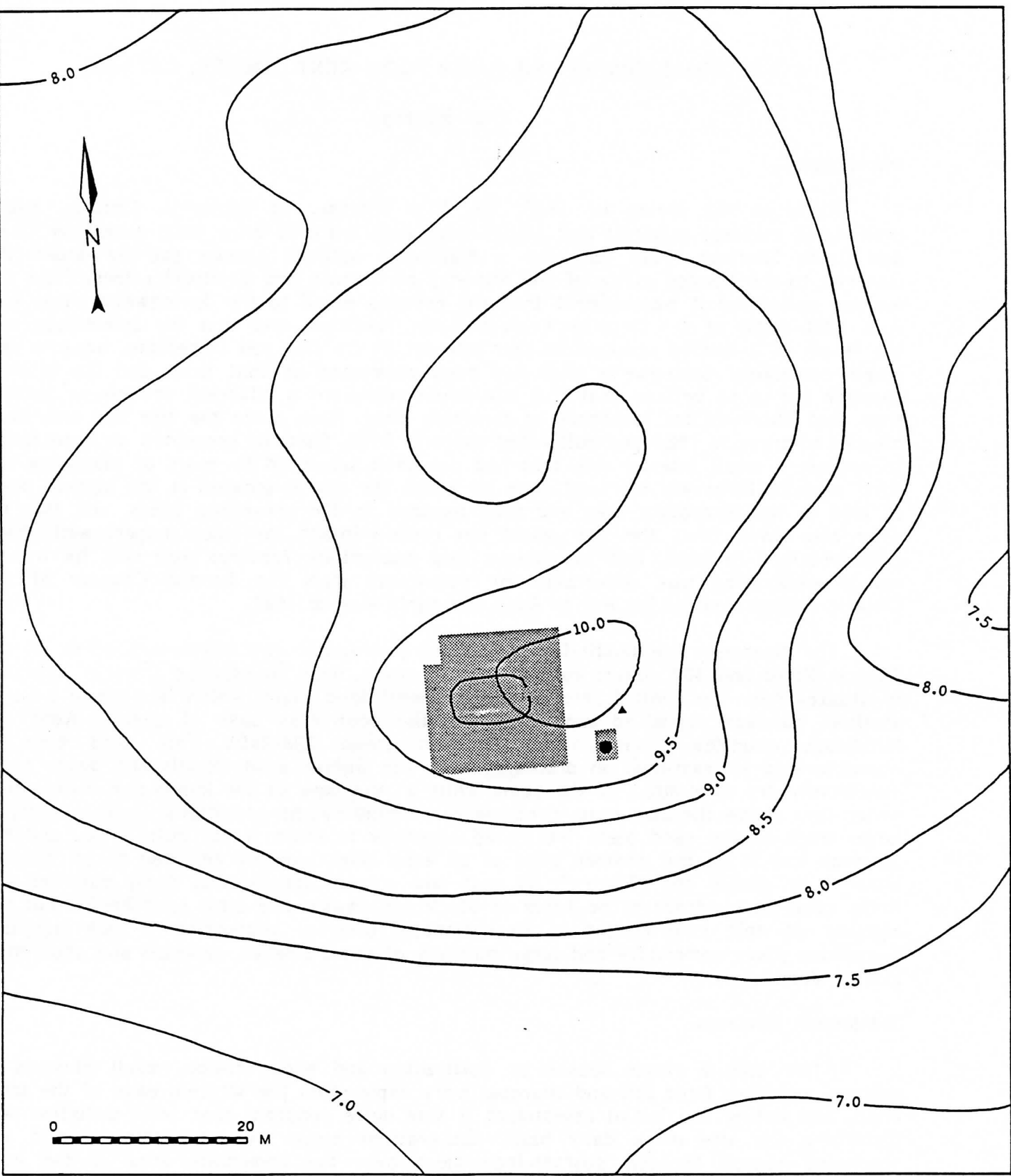


Figure 1: Sherman Site Contour Map Indicating Limits of Excavation. Contour intervals are 50 cm. The triangle represents the site's datum point.

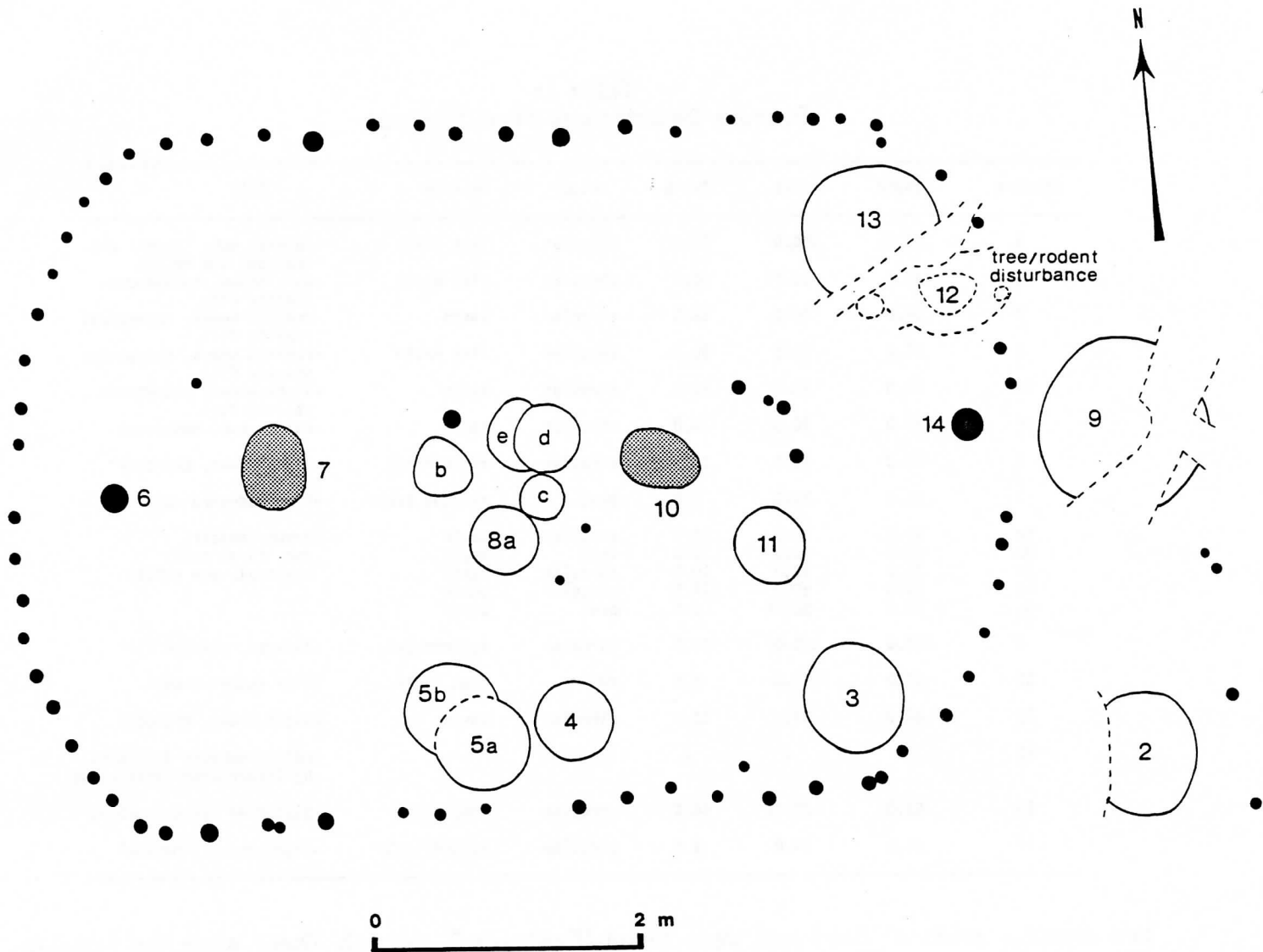


Figure 2: Sherman Site House. Stippled features are hearths.

Squares excavated over the main concentration soon exposed house wall posts that were often barely distinguishable from the surrounding subsoil. These posts tended to fade rapidly once the moisture laden sand was exposed to the sun and dry air. Thus for much of the house wall, posts were marked and recorded in sets of two or three then quickly covered to be relocated and sectioned later. Drifting sand also hampered recording efforts, ruined a camera, and on a number of visits to the site, made excavating over the house area impossible. Eventually, however, an oval house wall pattern was outlined, consisting of 64 exterior posts placed approximately 10 to 12 cm apart, delineating a 5 by 7 meter house (Figure 2). The corners of the structure were strengthened with one large post, or a double set of smaller posts. Topsoil screening continued over the artifact concentration and within the walls of the structure, exposing 14 subsoil pit features, two hearths, two large interior posts and a number of smaller posts near the center of the house (Figure 2; Table 1).

Inside the house at the Sherman site were two large posts, found at the east and west ends (Features 6 and 14). These were shallow and probably not intended to act as supports for either the superstructure or bunk lines. Between the two interior posts,

Table 1:  
Feature Descriptions From Sherman

Feature	Length	Width	Depth	Plan	Profile	Fill
1	110.0	100.0	32.0	circular	flat basin	-layered ash, topsoil and charcoal and refuse
2	92.0	90.0?	35.0	circular	flat basin	-dark brown, homogenous sterile fill
3	84.0	76.0	34.0	circular	basin	-reddish brown, homogenous sterile fill
4	56.0	56.0	38.0	circular	flat basin	-reddish brown, homogenous sterile fill
5a	70.0	70.0	24.0	circular	basin	-light brown, homogenous sterile fill
5b	72.0	70.0?	26.0	circular	basin	-dark brown, homogenous
6	20.0	20.0	10.0	circular	cylindrical	-light brown, charcoal
7	61.0	52.0	5.0	oval	shallow basin	-fire reddened soil
8a	50.0	50.0	30.0	circular	basin	-brown topsoil,
8b	50.0	42.0	10.0	oval	basin	ash, fired soil,
8c	34.0	32.0	10.0	circular	basin	charcoal, and refuse
8d	52.0	50.0	14.0	circular	basin	
8e	60.0	32.0?	8.0	oval	basin	
9	130.0	125.0?	80.0	circular	cylindrical	-layered, sterile fill
10	62.0	46.0	5.0	oval	flat basin	-fire reddened soil
11	56.0	54.0	18.0	circular	basin	-light brown, charcoal
12	-	-	-	-	-	-refuse deposit destroyed by tree/rodent disturbance
13	92.0	92.0?	56.0	circular	deep basin	-disturbed refuse deposit
14	24.0	24.0	8.0	circular	cylindrical	-light brown, charcoal

two circular areas of fired soil were found (Features 7 and 10). These were the remains of two hearths placed along the central axis of the house interior. Between the hearths were a circular series of five small pit features and scattered post moulds (Figure 2). Four of these features contained mottled ash, charcoal and domestic refuse, and Feature 8c was completely filled with the upright, plough-truncated base of a large, bag-shaped ceramic vessel (Figure 3). Pottery vessels of the Springwells phase are generally characterized by extremely elongated neck and body areas (Kenyon et al 1988; Reid 1983: Figure 2), and the body of the vessel found in Feature 8c is consistent with this form. The vessel contained both calcined and non-calcined bone from white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbit and raccoon (Prevec 1988: 4). Curiously, a small hole was drilled slightly off-centre at the base of this pot, and perhaps served as a drain, which may give a clue as to the function of this seemingly awkward and fragile vessel style. A substantial amount of fire-cracked rock was also recovered over the house area (Table 2), and after combining all this evidence, it appears that one method of food preparation practiced by the occupants involved heating a meat broth with hot stones in a large, partially buried pot. Thus the other features in this cluster may have also functioned as "pot-holders", and it may be that bag-shaped Western Basin Tradition ceramic vessels may have been designed for such a cooking function. Perhaps the hole drilled in the bottom of the Sherman specimen was to drain or flush the pot, without disturbing its position in the pit.

Seven additional features were identified in the eastern half of the house, and except for Feature 13, these were shallow and relatively sterile (Table 1). Feature 13 contained the majority of the refuse recovered from a pit within the house, while much



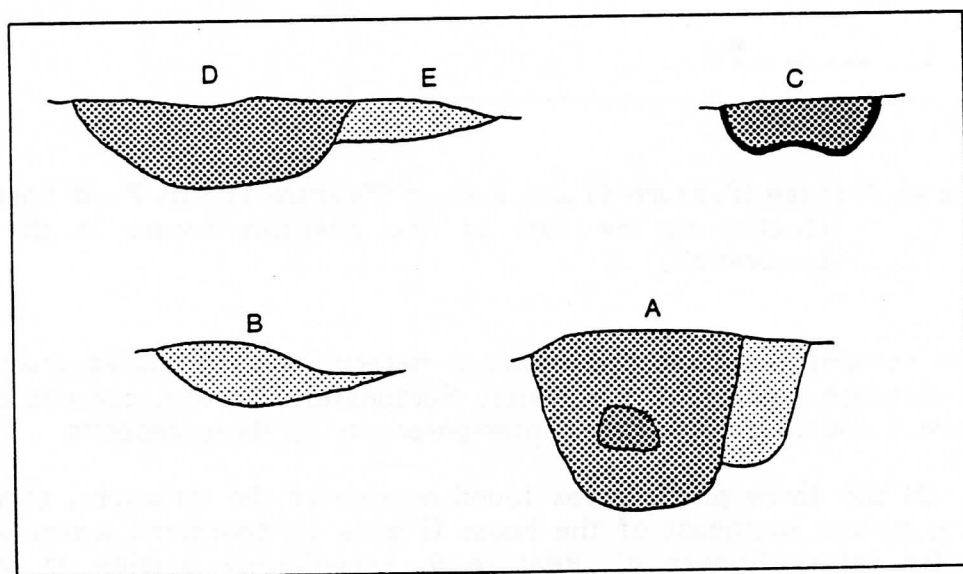
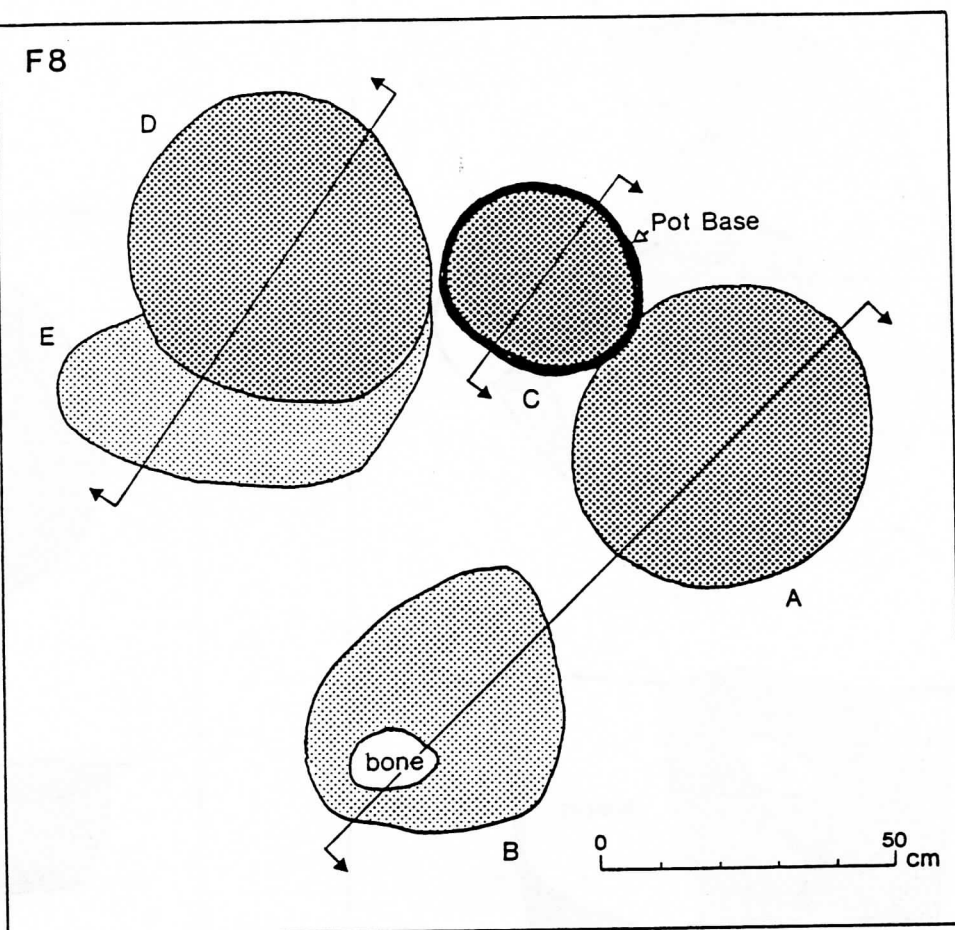


Figure 3: Plans and Profiles of the Feature 8 Complex of Pits Adjacent to the Hearths (Features 7 and 10), Within the Sherman Site House. Feature 8c contained the plough-truncated body of a Springwells phase vessel.

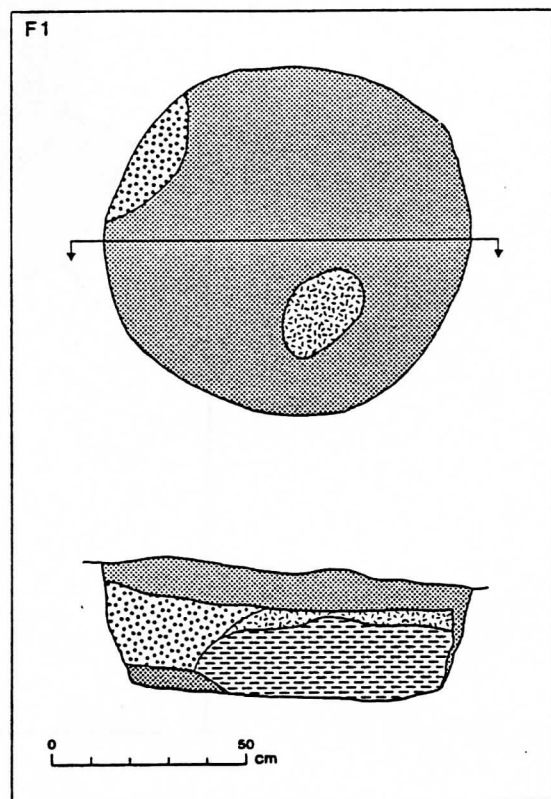
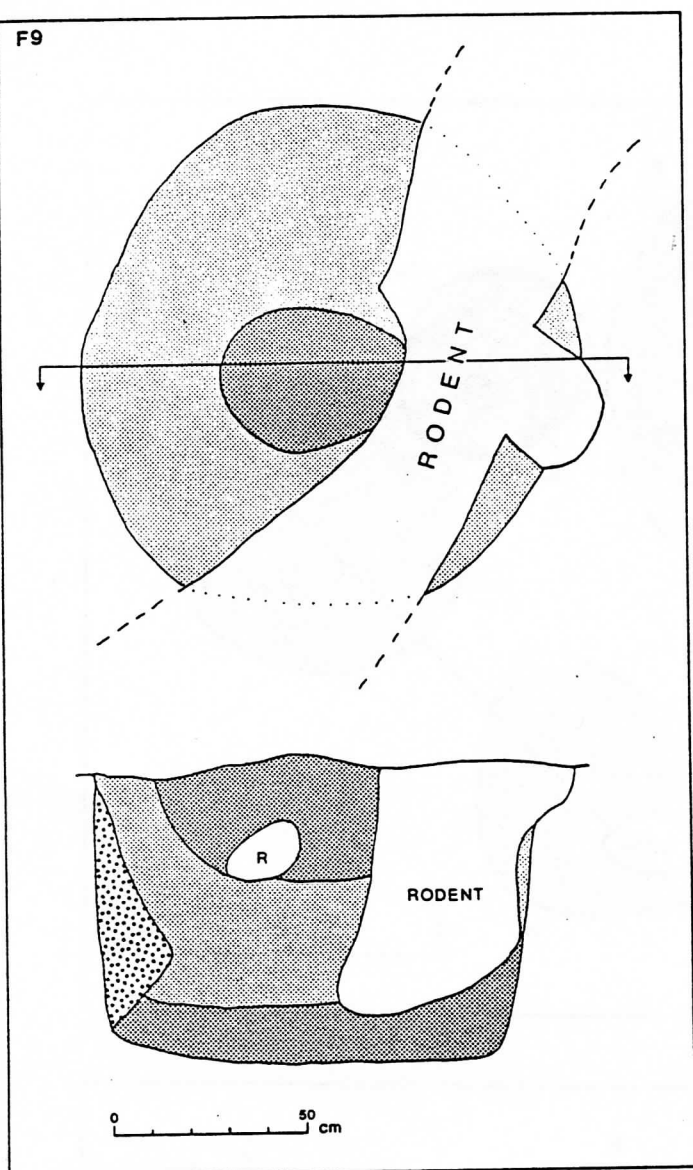


Figure 4: Storage (Feature 9) and Refuse (Feature 1) Pits From Sherman. Feature 1 was located to the east of the Sherman house, in the secondary area of excavation.

of the remaining undisturbed cultural material was recovered from Feature 1, located some distance outside of the house. Fortunately, several ceramic cross-mends between Feature 1 and 13 confirm the contemporaneity of these deposits.

Of the three pit features found outside of the structure, only Feature 1, located several meters southeast of the house (Figure 1), contained lenses of ash, fired soil and domestic refuse (Figure 4). Feature 9, immediately outside of what appears to the eastern oriented doorway to the house, was a deep, straight-sided pit, filled with a homogenous, nearly sterile soil matrix, and likely served a storage function (Figure 4). The remaining outside feature (Feature 2) was quite shallow, and again relatively sterile.

Unfortunately, time and labour restraints did not allow for extensive topsoil screening in order to identify external activity or work areas, but on days that were too windy to record features, topsoil surrounding the house was shovelled away for

about five meters in all directions (Figure 1), and except for Feature 1, no additional features or posts were found away from the main concentration.

### Artifacts

A substantial amount of cultural material was recovered from the 480 square meters of screened topsoil over the house, and from the undisturbed feature deposits (Table 2). While certainly not all materials discarded during the occupation are present in the sample, this is one of the most representative artifact collections for a Western Basin site excavated in southwestern Ontario to date. Elsewhere, on sites which have suffered much more from agricultural erosion, we tend often to be left with only the bottoms of the deepest pits and very poor artifact preservation (eg. Kenyon et al 1988). Like any new site type, the data from Sherman has generated more questions than answers, however, in-depth inquiries are really beyond the scope of this preliminary presentation, so just a general outline of the artifact material is provided below.

Table 2:  
Artifact Catalogue From the Sherman Site

	TOTAL No	TOTAL Wt
<b>CERAMICS</b>		
Cooking/Storage Vessels		
Rim Sherds		
horizontals	77	308.19
obliques	26	304.58
corded	4	66.26
plain	1	7.92
fragments	24	60.10
Neck Sherds		
ribbed paddle	98	1898.52
corded	16	164.10
roughened	8	36.92
plain	24	96.06
Body Sherds		
ribbed paddle	1132	4676.25
corded	161	487.43
roughened	117	495.84
plain	4	16.96
Unanalyzable Fragments	4520	3190.70
"Miniature" Ceramics		
Rim Sherds	2	2.95
Body Sherds	4	1.25
<b>LITHICS</b>		
Chipped Stone		
Debitage	2811	924.20
Bipolar Cores	23	100.83
Cores	8	175.45
Scraper	1	1.75
Utilized Flake	12	26.91
Biface	9	32.26
Fire Cracked Rock	439	5101.73
Other Lithics		
Anvil Stone	1	42.22
Limestone Object	1	79.34
<b>TOTAL CERAMICS</b>	6218	12014.03
<b>TOTAL CHIPPED STONE</b>	2864	1261.40
<b>TOTAL NON-CHIPPED STONE</b>	441	5223.29
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	9523	18498.72



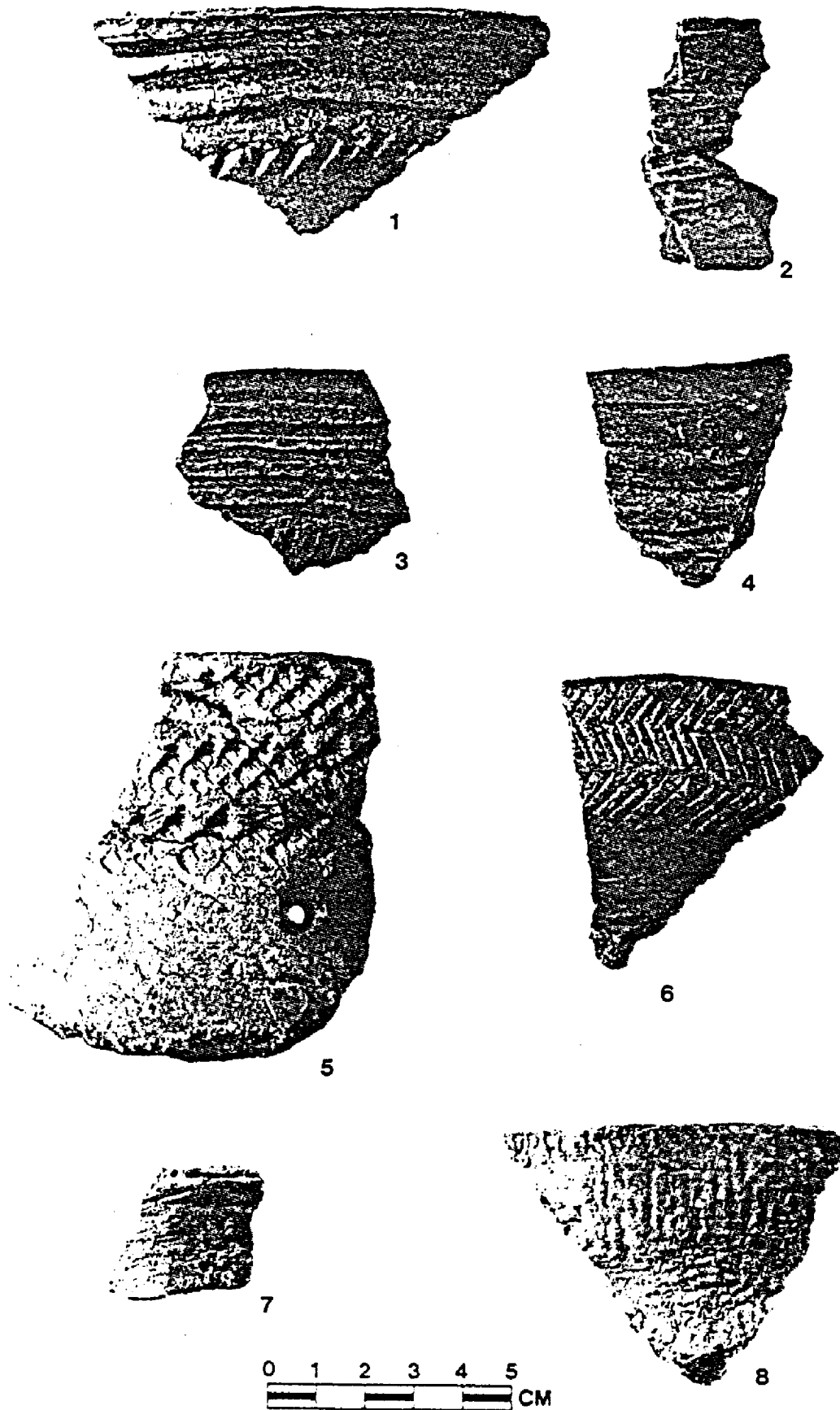


Figure 5: Rim Sherds From the Sherman Site. 1-4: Interrupted linear motifs; 5-6: Oblique Motifs; 7: Plain; 8: Vertical cordmarked.

## Ceramics

Ceramic vessel debris was prolific over the interior house area and represent the remains of 14 surprisingly heterogeneous vessels, two of which are poorly made miniature examples. Smoking pipe fragments or ceramic artifacts other than pottery vessels were not recovered from the site. Each of the utilitarian vessels in the collection are readily distinguishable, suggesting considerable individual expression regarding vessel decorative motifs on the site, or otherwise, that several individuals manufactured the Sherman site vessel assemblage. Vessel rims (Table 3) include six interrupted linear motifs (Figure 5:1-4), followed by four with oblique decoration (Figure 5:5-6), and single examples of plain and vertical cordmarked rimsherds (Figure 5:7-8). Collars on vessels are not pronounced and most of the upper rims are thickened, rather than heavily collared. Each of these vessels are typical examples of the mid to late stages of the Springwells phase (Murphy and Ferris 1990: 209-213). Confirming the temporal placement of this site were two carbon samples submitted from Features 1 and 8a, which returned uncorrected dates of A.D. 1240  $\pm$  70 (BGS 1251), and A.D. 1370  $\pm$  70 (BGS 1250).

Table 3:  
Sherman Site Rimsherd Attributes

#	Exterior Rim	Collar	Exterior Technique	Lip Decoration	Interior Motif	Upper Neck
1	horizontal	30.0	plain tool push-pull	linear push-pull	stamped oblique	stamped oblique
2	horizontal	25.0	cord-impressed	incised oblique	cord impressed	plain
3	horizontal	?	plain tool push pull	impressed oblique	plain	missing
4	horizontal	52.0	plain tool push-pull	plain	plain	stamped oblique
5	horizontal	?	plain tool push pull	linear push pull	plain	plain
6	horizontal	?	cord impressed	plain	plain	missing
7	oblique	16.5	corded stamp	smoothed cord stamp	corded oblique	plain
8	oblique	20.0	incised	plain	incised oblique	oblique
9	oblique	?	plain stamp	plain	plain tool push-pull	missing
10	oblique	?	plain stamp	stamped oblique	stamped oblique	missing
11	plain		plain	linear push-pull	horizontal push-pull	plain
12	cordmarked	30.0	vertical cording	plain	plain	vertical corded

Most pottery vessel body sherds are ribbed-paddled or slip-roughened (Figure 6:1-2), although the neck and body sherds associated with the vertical corded rimsherds also display very fine vertical cordmarking (Figure 6:3). The presence of this distinctive vertical cording on the Sherman site is the earliest documented example of this vessel body decoration in southwestern Ontario, which becomes increasingly common on later Wolf phase sites (Kenyon 1988; Vantomme 1965).

## Lithics

Lithic debitage was also abundant on the Sherman site and the majority of toolstone materials are water rolled glacial till cobbles of Onondaga and Selkirk chert. These could have been gathered from the bed of the Thames River or from end moraines along the north shore of Lake Erie. A small amount of Kettle Point chert, taken from the Lake Huron source or from tills north and west of the site, and a small quantity of black Upper Mercer chert from Ohio were also recovered. One of the few notable characteristics of the Sherman site lithic assemblage is the frequency of bipolar cores and debitage exhibiting bipolar battering. Over 90% of the cores recovered were reduced by the bipolar technique (Table 2), and most of which were recovered from the house interior. Each of the larger, random or rotated cores from the site were recovered from a lithic concentration northwest of the house.

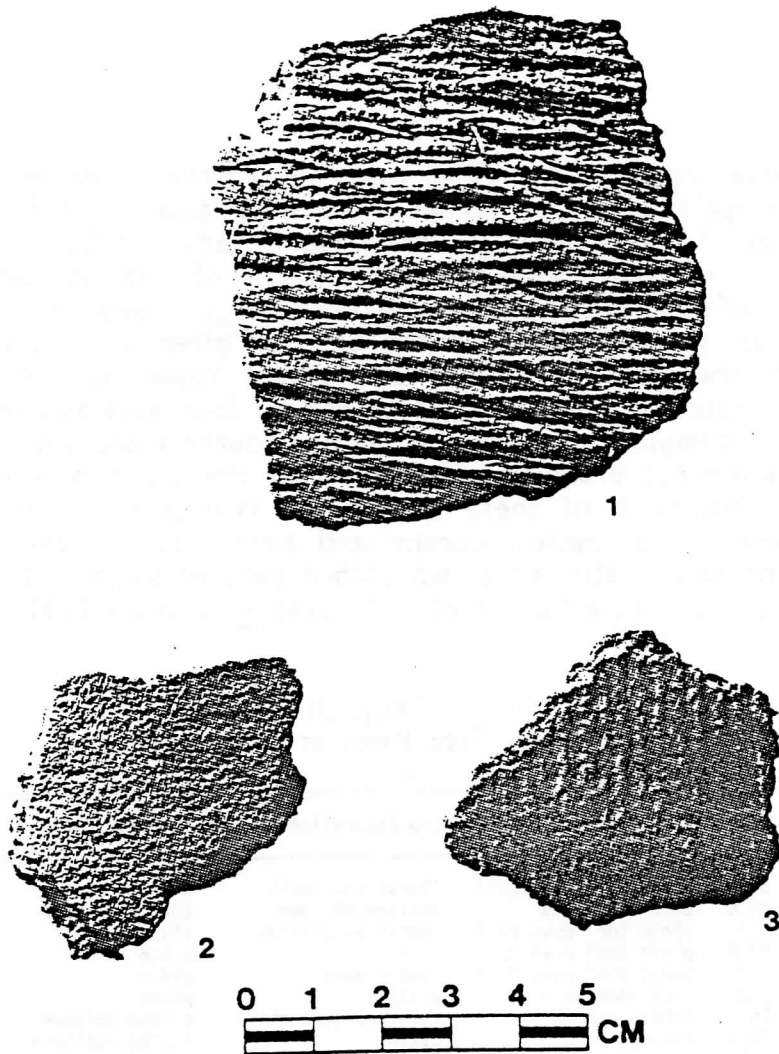


Figure 6: Body Sherds From Sherman. 1: Ribbed-paddled; 2: Slip-roughened; 3: Vertical cordmarked.

While lithic debris was common on the site, chipped stone tools (Figure 7) consist of only two projectile point tips, six biface fragments, and a single end scraper, while twelve flakes show evidence of expedient use-wear (Table 2). Ground stone tools were entirely absent, and rough stone is represented by a single hammer/anvil stone fragment.

### Faunal Remains

A total of 5599 faunal elements from the ploughzone and subsoil features of the Sherman site have been analyzed by Rosemary Prevec (1988). Much of this material was burned and fragmented as if every last bit of marrow was extracted from each bone. Only eleven species were identified, reflecting a limited range of animals exploited (Table 4). White-tailed deer and raccoon make up the majority of the mammal bone, while most other species are represented by only a few elements. A minimum number of two deer and two raccoon are indicated, and all body portions of these animals are present in the sample (Prevec 1988: 4). This suggests that complete carcasses were transported to the site, and that hunting activities likely concentrated on the nearby swamps and dunes. Fish are represented by small frequencies of sucker, walleye, and perch. The remaining faunal assemblage consists of a wild turkey bone bead, clam shell fragments, a pond turtle shell fragment, and two ground antler fragments.



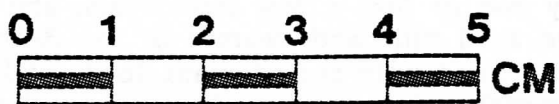


Figure 7: Lithic Tools From the Sherman Site.

Table 4:  
Faunal Remains From the Sherman Site

Species	Total Bone	No. Burned	Individuals
<u>Leporidae sp.</u> (cottontail or snowshoe rabbit)	10	9	1
<u>Sciurus carolinensis</u> (grey squirrel)	11	6	1
<u>Marmota monax</u>	13	3	1
<u>Procyon lotor</u> (raccoon)	67	40	2
<u>Odocoileus virginianus</u> (white-tailed deer)	317	187	2
Unidentified Mammal	5098	4879	
<u>Catostomidae sp.</u> (white or longnose sucker)	20		1
<u>Stizostedion sp.</u> (walleye or sauger)	1		1
<u>Perciformes sp.</u> (perch-like fish)	1		1
Unidentified Fish	22	2	
<u>Unionidae sp.</u> (clam)	5	1	
<u>Meleagris gallopava</u> (wild turkey)	5	1	1
<u>Emydidae sp.</u> (pond turtle)	1	1	1
Class Uncertain	28	25	
TOTAL	5599	5154	

Based on usable meat estimates and daily caloric requirements (Cleland 1966), the identified faunal remains represent about 100 subsistence days for an adult male. While these kinds of estimates are often not very revealing, the limited number of individual animals does suggest that the site was not occupied for a lengthy period of time, and possibly for only a single season. According to Prevec (1988: 6), the usual variety of animals recovered from intensively sampled warm season or year round sites in south-western Ontario is between 25 and 40 species. The limited Sherman assemblage is certainly not the result of poor preservation, and the species brought to the site are generally those available during the winter months. These species can be successfully stalked or trapped by one or just a few individuals, and would be the expected winter meat source from the sand hills and swamps of the Bothwell Sand Plain. The minimum number of animals, combined with stored plant foods and fish, could conceivably feed a family over several months when activity levels were low - such as the winter months when people may have practiced a form of human hibernation.

### Floral Remains

Flotation samples totalling 422.5 liters were gathered from Sherman site features. These have been sorted for artifacts, bone and larger floral remains, but the light

fractions have not been completely processed. A relatively large amount of charred black walnut shell, and more limited quantities of maize kernel fragments, are present in the unsorted flotation residue. A substantial amount of nut shell suggests that some of the larger pits on the site, such as Feature 9 outside of the eastern doorway or Feature 13 within the house, may have been excavated to store a supply of plant foods.

## Discussion

The design of the Sherman house is compact, energy efficient, and of sufficient size to have housed a nuclear, or small extended family. On the basis of the distribution of faunal species alone, the Sherman site would appear to represent a well preserved example of a Western Basin Tradition winter house. While comparative prehistoric analogues are absent, and while it may be some time before similar sites are identified, an examination of ethnographic and historic data reveals that the Sherman site closely resembles a specialized structural form used by the Central Algonquian peoples of the lower Great Lakes during the historic period, and consequently, also supports the inferred ethnic affiliation of the prehistoric Western Basin peoples (Murphy and Ferris 1990). The Sherman structure closely conforms to the traditional "winter cabin" or "wigwam" of the Sauk (Skinner 1925: 124), Fox (Forsyth 1912: 227-228), and Kickapoo peoples (Latorre and Latorre 1976: 40-41; Ritzenthaler and Peterson 1956: 30-31), recorded in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (see also Callender 1978a: 637; 1978b: 649; Callender et al 1978: 658; Goddard 1978: 671).

The ethnographic literature regarding historic Central Algonquian settlement and subsistence practices is extensive, and just a few of the more pertinent sources are summarized below. Winter cabins were considered the property of adult women, and erected in October and occupied until March. The house was oval or rectangular in plan, seven to eight meters in length, and five meters wide (late 19th century photographs of Sauk and Fox winter cabins can be found in Callender 1978a: 638; 1978b: 651). The walls were constructed of small saplings planted upright in the ground and tied at the top to form a low, domed roof. The exterior was covered with bark slabs or reed mats. Two interior poles were placed along the mid-line at the east and west end of the house, and these held cross-bar supporting kettles or cooking pots over the hearth. Hunting charms, scared packs and fetishes were all hung from the eastern post. A cooking-heating hearth was placed near the center of the structure and much of the day-to-day working and eating activities took place near the eastern doorway. Reed mats were placed on the ground along the north and south walls for sitting and sleeping, and the northern end of the house was used for storage (Forsyth 1912: 227; Skinner 1925: 124-125; Ritzenthaler and Peterson 1956: 30-31). This form of winter house was still in use among the more conservative Central Algonquian groups at the turn of the last century (Callender 1978a: 637; 1978b: 649), while modern Kickapoo groups residing in Coahuila State, Mexico still adhere to the traditional winter dwelling style (Latorre and Latorre 1976: 40-41; Ritzenthaler and Peterson 1956: 30-31). This conservatism among the less acculturated Mexican Kickapoo is largely due to the role that houses play in their annual social and religious cycle, and are "...inextricably woven into each phase of the culture, especially the religion, the economy, and the status of women" (Latorre and Latorre: 1976: 35).

The similarities between the Sherman site structure and the historic Central Algonquian winter houses include size, configuration, mid-line poles, central hearths, and the bare sleeping areas to the rear of the house. These parallels represent more than mere coincidence, and the Sherman site fills a major gap in the archaeological record of southwestern Ontario. Prior to the Sherman site, excavations of Springwells phase sites documented only warm weather settlements, which showed little indication



of a year round occupation. Therefore, we suspected that some form of small, extended family camp must have been utilized during the winter months, though the size and configuration of the winter settlements could not have been guessed at, and we were largely left to drawing analogies with the historic Algonquian hunting and gathering groups of the upper Great Lakes who occupied southwestern Ontario in the 18th and 19th centuries (Ferris et al 1985; Ferris 1989).

It is now apparent that the traditional Central Algonquian winter cabin of the historic period was in use during the latter part of the prehistoric period. Obviously, additional archaeological examples of winter cabins will be required to confirm the widespread prehistoric use of the traditional Central Algonquian winter house in southwestern Ontario, and to determine whether it evolved during the latter part of the prehistoric period, or if houses similar to the Sherman example were the typical winter settlement form used throughout the Western Basin Late Woodland. Certainly the role that Algonquian houses played in the individual and mutual identity of these peoples can be seen as support of a possible early origin for the dome shaped winter cabin, and future research may quite possibly find that a similar "pan Algonquian" winter house form was in use several millenia before the occupation of the Sherman site.

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